

White House Conference on Aging

Outline for Ed Pittock

1. My name's Ed Pittock, and I'm founder and president of Society of Certified Senior Advisors. We have 12,000 members who serve an estimated three million seniors yearly. In my years of working with our members, I've concluded that a fundamental problem is that Americans are better talking about the symptoms of an aging population than dealing with its causes.
2. For example, we're engaged in a bitter national debate about Social Security. Privatize it or keep it as it is? Both sides miss the essential point. The important point is that we worry more about the destination we face in life than how to make the journey.
3. We do a very poor job of teaching our citizens how to age successfully. When people spend more time planning their vacations than their retirement, when we spend more money teaching people how to prevent babies than how to enjoy grandchildren, when we worry more about how we will take care of an aging population than how we can teach an aging population to take care of itself, we're only fooling ourselves and perpetuating a mindset that has led to a crisis in aging.
4. Our problem isn't that people don't have long term care insurance. It's that we don't ensure that they know how to care for themselves in the long term.

5. So I would hope that if we could accomplish just one thing for America's seniors, it would be to commit to giving them the knowledge they need for the lives they want to live.
6. Knowledge is the most empowering asset anyone can have. And that suggests two solutions.
7. First, we should undertake a national public awareness effort that dispels myths about aging and establishes the value of both seniors and planning for being an elder – but not elderly.
8. Second, we should make a national commitment to an education program that goes down to the grassroots, including train-the-trainer initiatives for professionals who work with baby boomers and seniors.